

Gardner is best for New Hampshire NEW HAMPSHIRE VOICES

Opinion

BILL GARDNER IS a simple guy. He doesn't give eloquent speeches or write fire and brimstone editorials. For 42 years, Gardner has shown up to work in his State House office and gone about the business of overseeing New Hampshire's elections without fanfare or, oftentimes, even much notice.

That's how the role of Secretary of State is supposed to work in New Hampshire. Unlike many other states, our Secretary of State is not elected on the ballot, but instead is chosen by a majority vote of our House of Representatives and state Senate. You would think that this process would lead to a change in Secretary of State every time there has been a change in the House majority, but such has not been the case under the leadership of Bill Gardner.

Gardner has quietly executed the duties of his office with unquestioned integrity and character from one election cycle to the next. He has conducted himself in office with unwavering, non-partisan, ethical decorum. Over the years, he has protected our first-in-the-nation status in quiet confrontation with governors, presidential candidates and national political party leaders.

He has overseen nearly 550 election recounts, 32 of which came down to a one-vote margin and 11 of which ended in ties. Gardner has tirelessly safeguarded the electoral process in New Hampshire. He is possibly the most trusted, most respected person in Granite State government.

On Dec. 5, when the House convenes for Organization Day, Gardner will face a challenge from political operative Colin Van Ostern. Van Ostern first came to New Hampshire to work for the Democratic Party, has acted as advisor for various elected Democrats, including Rep. Ann Kuster and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, was twice elected to the Executive Council and lost an attempt to become Governor in 2016. He currently works at Southern New Hampshire University.

Earlier this year, Van Ostern launched his "Free and Fair" PAC and has spent all of his time since advancing a false

and damaging narrative that voting in New Hampshire is in fact not free and fair. That is a message that is both disgusting and dishonest.

He would have you believe that there is rampant voter suppression in our state, in spite of the fact that we just completed an election with record high turnout, thousands of first-time registrations and not a single reported case of suppression or intimidation. Van Ostern's party leaders have made similar false allegations and have begun to use this narrative as a reason to question New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation role.

He raised more than \$250,000 through his PAC and spent it to get Democrats elected to the House; the same Democrats whose votes he is now counting on to make him Secretary of State. Van Ostern is essentially hoping to buy his way into the seat.

In an era of political tribalism and angry, divisive political wars, New Hampshire's tradition of a non-partisan Secretary of State is an example to behold across the country of how government can serve a greater cause when party is left out of it. Van Ostern has already politicized this process with his partisan attacks and out-of-state fundraising. He cannot be trusted with the extraordinary responsibility of protecting the integrity of our elections.

With a new majority of Democrats in the House, the numbers are against Bill Gardner in this race. One can only hope that at least a few of those new Democrats, elected to represent the best interests of the people of New Hampshire, will start out strong by standing up to their party and reelecting Bill Gardner as Secretary of State.

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